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Inciting Assassination

IN San Francisco, a Black Panther fanatic named David Hilliard has been indicted in a federal court for shouting at a "peace" rally, "We will kill Richard Nixon!" There's no shortage of witnesses: Hilliard's murderous words were televised.

Hilliard, already awaiting trial (on bail, until this new charge) for attempted murder and assault with a deadly weapon against police, was eminent among the crew of ideologues and paranoiacs who tried to pull apart San Francisco State College. Others who incite to political murder remain at liberty.

In the foul pages of the Berkeley Barb, recently one writer sneered at the presidential commission on violence and concluded by suggesting that his chums still could "give a third eye" to President Nixon and Vice President Agnew. In Britain, where the press is at least as free as in the United States, such an advocate of homicide

already would have been sentenced and be serving a long term.

TO distinguish between lunatic rhetoric and serious advocacy of assassination, true, is not always easy. The Barb (nowadays devoted, in considerable part, to champion-ship of homosexuals) is a crazy sheet, with crazy readers. Its new proprietor, on taking up publication from its previous owner after a strike against its "slave labor" wages, was so liberal and imprudent as to publish a reader's letter accusing him (the new publisher) of being either a police spy or an agent of the CIA. To the publisher's chagrin, those faithful readers of the Barb who believe their paper's every phrase took at face value the reader's accusation, and circulation is said to have fallen off proportionately.

Craziness, nevertheless, is no insurance against terrible violence; most political assassins are crackpots in more ways than one. As for Hilliard and the Black Panthers generally, their talk of killing certainly is no idle screech-

ing: Hilliard's three superiors in the Panther hierarchy — Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale — all are indicted for shoot-outs or worse. The danger is clear and present.

INCITING to assassination is punishable, under federal statute, by maximum sentences of five years in prison and a \$1,000 fine. These penalties are curiously lenient. As Abraham Lincoln said of inciters to desertion, the agents who encourage the crime are worse than the silly boys who act upon their exhortations. Those who openly advocate murder ought to face the possibility of execution.

IN five political or quasi-political murders — those of President John F. Kennedy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, George Lincoln Rockwell and Senator Robert Kennedy — only one assassin has paid with his life, and that one (Oswald) only as victim of another murderer. The killer of Rockwell was given an amazingly light sentence by a Virginia court. Other cases, notably the murder of Medgar Evers, have produced no convictions at all.

A nation so sentimental (about criminals) or so apathetic that it will not protect or avenge public men (regardless of their opinions and merits) cannot expect to remain a free republic. We release on bail paranoiacs who use their freedom to commit another hideous crime or two. Even in the national capital, theoretically governed by Congress, so eminent a liberal as Senator Tydings, of Maryland, cannot persuade his colleagues to restrain the abuse of bail and parole. How many more leaders must die before we remember that the Bill of Rights is not a suicide pact?